

# Today's deal could be tomorrow's embarrassment

BY R. RAMAN

US President George W. Bush has been the toast of large sections of the elite in India, particularly from the cocooned classes of strategic oracles, serving bureaucrats, businessmen and prospering and upwardly mobile millionaire and multi-millionaire journalists.

They certainly did not have time or empathy for the thousands of Muslims who were demonstrating in the streets. A multi-millionaire journalist was asked in a TV interview what he thought of the over one hundred thousand Muslims who were demonstrating in the streets of Mumbai. He replied contemptuously, "Let them demonstrate. We are a democracy. They have a right to demonstrate. People demonstrate against Bush in the US too."

But the toast of today could become the embarrassment of tomorrow. Remember the toast with champagne of those neocons of the US and their embedded journalists, who sang and danced in the ballrooms of Washington DC after the entry of US troops in Kabul in 2001 and their occupation of Iraq in 2003? Remember the "India Shining" toasts of the BJP before the elections of 2004?

Last year, an official of the US State Department elucidated the criteria which might govern the US decision on the proposal for the expansion of permanent membership of the UN Security Council. The strategic oracles of New Delhi jumped with joy and interpreted this statement as indicating a US decision to back India for permanent membership. What happened to their toasts today?

The US is a superpower not only because of its material and human resources and the capacity for hard work and the innovative spirit of its citizens. It is also because its political leadership and other policymakers have a lucid understanding of its national interests and are prepared for any twists and turns in policy in order to promote those interests. Its interests are strategic, but its relationships are tactical. Look at the way it used Pakistan, discarded it and again started using it.

Is its newfound enthusiasm for India tactical or strategic? We should presume it to be tactical unless it is proved to be genuinely strategic and avoid putting all our eggs in the US basket and building castles in the air about

with US help. There is nothing wrong in our wanting to become an equal of China. It should be through our own efforts.

It is a tactical gain for India because the US has conceded the autonomy of Indian decision-making relating to the separation plan which specifies which of the reactors or establishments would be in the civilian sector and which in the military. The US has also accepted the Indian intention to keep its fast-breeder programme out of the civilian list.

It is a strategic gain for the US because it has made India accept



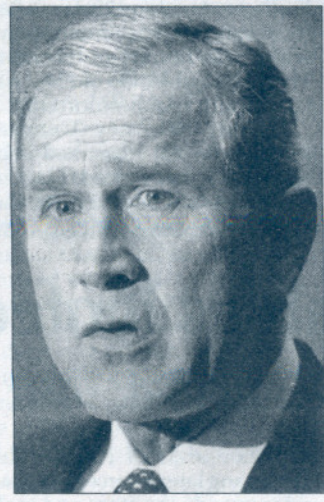
in return the irreversibility of its decisions on separation once they are formalised. India has been made to renounce its options for flexibility in future to cater to any changes in India's threat perception. This option for flexibility has been retained by other nuclear powers, but the US was not prepared to concede this flexibility to India and we have acquiesced in it.

Possible Chinese opposition during the third stage of acceptance by the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) cannot be ruled out. One should not forget the Chinese opposition, at Pakistani instigation, to India becoming a permanent member of the UN Security Council. The fifth and final stage will be the conclusion of an "India-specific" safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency at Vienna. This is a euphemism for India's formalising its acceptance of the principle of irreversibility of its decision whatever be the future threats to its security.

During Mr Bush's visit, this pressure started operating in the case of Burma and Nepal too. Support for the US position on

towards the Maoists of Nepal is the new price that has been demanded and probably accepted by Dr Manmohan Singh.

By unintended coincidence, the long-term US exercise for bringing about a regime change in Tehran was set in motion in Washington during Mr Bush's visit to India. Even as Mr Bush and Dr Singh were holding their talks in New Delhi on March 2, the US state department announced in Washington the creation of a special office to deal with foreign policy changes related to Iran and to promote a



democratic transition in the Islamic republic. "Certainly this signals the fact that we believe that Iran and Iranian behaviour is one of the greatest foreign policy priorities we will be dealing with over the next decade," a state department official said.

The creation of the Iran Office comes in the wake of an announcement last month by Condoleezza Rice of a \$75 million state department initiative to support democracy in Iran through intensified cultural exchanges, increased programmes for democratic advocates and expanded broadcasting into the country. When asked directly whether the office is being created to promote a regime change in Iran, the senior official said the office is being created "to facilitate a change in Iranian policies and actions." He added, "Yes, one of the things we want to develop is a government that reflects the desires of the people, but that is a process for the Iranians."

Having (hopefully) learnt from its experience in Iraq, the US intends to bring about a regime change in Iran, not through military invasion, but through political

ated Iran Office will coordinate this covert action. India, which has the world's second largest Shia population after Iran, with many of them having links with Iran, will be an important window on Iran for US intelligence agencies for the collection of intelligence from Iran and for the identification of assets which could be used for the covert action. The proposed increase in the number of US diplomats to be posted in India, many of whom will definitely be from the CIA, and opening of a consulate in Hyderabad which has India's second

largest Shia population after Lucknow, have to be seen as part of this exercise for a regime change in Tehran through political covert action. Indian silence and acquiescence over the use of its territory by US agencies for covert action against Iran could be one of the prices demanded by the US as a quid pro quo for the implementation of the nuclear deal.

Despite the many smiles, the way the present government has handled India's relations with the US has left scars in the hearts of the Indian Muslim minority. Its muted silence on issues angering Muslims and its insensitivity to their feelings over issues such as Fallujah, Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib etc., have created growing pockets of anger in our Muslim community, particularly the youth. This does not bode well for the future. Alienation of the Indian Muslim youth outside Jammu & Kashmir and driving them to identify themselves with the anti-US and pan-Islamic ideologies of Al Qaeda and the International Islamic Front (IIF), is an imminent danger due to the ill-advised insensitivity of the government towards the hurt feelings of Indian Muslims.

The countrywide demonstrations seen during the visit of Mr Bush are an external manifestation of the seething anger inside the hearts of a growing number of our Muslim youth. The government's ill-advised silence and actions have sown the seeds of pan-Islamism in the Indian Muslim community, which had in the past kept away from it. If the intelligence agencies of Pakistan and Iran exploit this for their own purpose, we will have only ourselves to blame for it.

B. Raman is Additional Secretary (Retd), Cabinet Secretariat, government of India, and, presently, Director, Institute For Topical Studies, Chennai.